

International Terrorism:  
Before and After the US Airstrike

Summary

The level of international terrorist activity has shown no appreciable change during the 45-day period following the US airstrikes on Libya compared with a similar period preceding the raids. Although international terrorist attacks increased immediately following the US naval operations in the Gulf of Sidra and again after the US airstrikes, the elevated levels did not persist over the six-week period. And, surprisingly, the upsurge in terrorist activity following the Gulf of Sidra did not occur in the Middle East or Western Europe -- where it might have been expected -- but in Latin America. Anti-US terrorist groups in the region almost certainly did not act at Libya's behest but seized the opportunity to once again lash out at American targets as part of an ongoing anti-US campaign, to demonstrate their fraternal solidarity with Libya, and to express empathy with others who condemn "US imperialism."

25X1

25X1

25X1

[REDACTED]

The available data do permit some generalizations but it is too early to determine the significance of these indicators.

- o The number of attacks against US persons and property rose by more than 20 percent, but most of that occurred in Latin America.
- o There were no spectacular incidents such as the 5 April bombing of the West Berlin discotheque that killed two -- one a US soldier -- and injured more than 200, including 64 Americans. Another US soldier died two months later. Thus, total casualties of all nationalities -- but especially US - fell off sharply.
- o Business interests absorbed more terrorist strikes than did military, diplomatic or governmental targets. This probably can be partly explained, by the conspicuous hardening of security at official installations. Heightened awareness and enhanced security prevented at least one potentially spectacular attack on a civilian target at London's Heathrow airport. [REDACTED]

25X1

Past experience demonstrates that a dramatic upsurge in international terrorist incidents usually occurs in the immediate aftermath of significant political or military events. In the wake of the Israeli incursion into Lebanon in June 1982, for example, a rash of international terrorist incidents occurred worldwide, with many claimants linking their actions to solidarity with the Arab victims. Such events usually also trigger enormous increases in the number of plots, threats and

25X1

[redacted]

hoaxes we receive, although none of these are included in our statistics. Moreover, heightened awareness and enhanced security in the wake of the US airstrikes on Libya prevented at least one potentially spectacular attack at London's Heathrow airport. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

[redacted]

Target: United Kingdom

British interests suffered more international terrorist attacks in the six-week period following the raids than in the earlier comparable period, probably because of the UK's assistance for the US airstrikes. Several incidents which resulted in British fatalities were expressly linked by their perpetrators to British assistance to the US.

- o On 17 April, the Revolutionary Organization of Socialist Muslims -- a covername for Abu Nidal -- claimed it had executed British journalist Alec Collett, who was abducted in Lebanon in March 1985. A communique asserted that Collett was killed "to punish Thatcher" for British support of the US raid.
- o Also on 17 April, the bodies of two British hostages (along with that of an American seized in Beirut in November 1984) kidnaped a few days after the US operation in the Gulf of Sidra -- almost certainly at Libyan behest - were discovered in Lebanon. A group calling itself the "Arab Revolutionary Cells" claimed responsibility for the murders, stating the three had been killed in response to the US raid and British

25X1

25X1

assistance. [REDACTED]

25X1

Also affecting the UK was the E1 A1 jetliner bombing attempt which unfolded in London three days after the airstrike. E1 A1 security personnel uncovered a suitcase bomb [REDACTED]

25X1

[REDACTED] Had the device detonated, more than 300 casualties likely would have occurred; there were some 230

25X1

Americans on board. The incident apparently was unrelated to the US military action. [REDACTED]

25X1

Certain aspects of the E1 A1 plot, however, suggest the timetable for the attack may have been hastened. Planners may have believed that Libya would be fingered if the attack occurred on the heels of the US airstrike, encouraging them to expedite the operation. [REDACTED]

25X1

### Conclusions

We judge that it is too early to draw firm conclusions regarding the impact of the strikes: discerning trends requires larger pools of information for more extended periods of time. We do note, however, that several weeks after the airstrike, the number of international terrorist incidents per day appears to have leveled off, although it remains slightly above the level of the period preceding US activity in the Gulf of Sidra. The

25X1

[REDACTED]

apparent leveling off of activity has several possible explanations:

- o Terrorists who have been active require down-time to prepare their next operations -- particularly large-scale operations such as car bombings and kidnappings.
  - o Heightened security measures worldwide probably have deterred many terrorists or, at a minimum, encouraged them to defer carrying out operations until the security environment appears more relaxed.
  - o Syria, an active state supporter of international terrorism, may have retreated from such activity, at least for the short term, for fear of US retaliation. Damascus's concerns heightened as revelations surfaced of a Syrian role in the attempted bombing of the El Al flight at London in mid-April and the bombing of the German-Arab Friendship Union in West Berlin in late March.
  - o Qadhafi may be reassessing his international terrorist plans, particularly given the shake-up in personnel at a number of Libyan People's Bureaus in Western Europe.
- [REDACTED]

25X1

Timeline Depicting Major Events  
March - April 1986

- 24-25 March      US conducts naval operations in the Gulf of Sidra. Air battle ensues in which US airstrikes damage radar complex at Surt; also, 6th Fleet successfully attacks several Libyan patrol boats; spurs Qadhafi to call for attacks against US targets.
- 29 March        Two British citizens kidnaped in Beirut; Libya believed responsible.
- 29 March        Bombing of German-Arab Friendship Union in West Berlin; Syria believed responsible.
- 2 April         Bomb explodes aboard TWA Flight 840 as it approached Athens, killing four Americans. Device similar to those placed on airliners in 1982 by the Palestinian group 15 May.
- 5 April         La Belle discotheque in West Berlin bombed. One US soldier killed, another dies later; more than 200 wounded. Libya held responsible by US.
- 5 April         French expel two Libyans, two Lebanese, an Algerian and a Tunisian in plot to attack US Embassy in Paris.
- 14 April        US raids on Tripoli and Benghazi.
- 15 April        US national shot by unknown assailant in Khartoum; circumstantial evidence points to Libyan involvement.
- 17 April        Bodies of American citizen Peter Kilburn and two British hostages seized in late March, discovered; Libya believed responsible. Kilburn was kidnaped in November 1984; the Libyans probably "purchased" him from his original Lebanese captors.
- 17 April        Attempted bombing of El Al flight in London. Syria believed responsible.
- 18 April        Turks arrest four Libyans in plot to bomb US Officers Club in Ankara.
- 25 April        US Embassy communicator shot in Sanaa; Libya believed involved, but extent of involvement unclear.